

Retired School Administrators' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Ontario's Teacher  
Performance Appraisal System

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) system in Ontario by examining the perspectives of four retired administrators: three retired Principals, and one retired Vice-Principal. The study employed a basic qualitative methodology. Data were collected from the participants through semi-structured one-on-one in-person interviews. Data were then analyzed manually by coding and identifying major themes. Findings indicate that the TPA process has evolved from being viewed as a negatively conceived process to now being perceived as an integral part of the teaching profession. Conclusively, TPA, in its current form, is not very effective in facilitating teachers' professional learning and development, but it has the potential to be more effective if it is conducted as a continuous process rather than as a one-time event every five years.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

This study investigated the perspectives of retired school administrators on the effectiveness of the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) process in Ontario, Canada. To do this, the researcher interviewed four retired administrators, three Principals and one Vice-Principal. In order to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of the TPA process that has evolved over time, the researcher purposefully selected participants who were in service in 2002, the year when TPA was first introduced, and conducted evaluations at least for two years after that point. Literature suggests that TPA was introduced as a measure of accountability in education. Teachers perceived the TPA as a negative, ineffective, and time-consuming process. Previous studies on TPA were based on the perspectives of teachers, and mostly, those studies do not reflect the current situation of teacher assessment. Little research has been done to understand the administrators' perspectives on the process, thus failing to identify whether the TPA process is actually effective or not in the eyes of school leadership.

This chapter provides the context of the study. It briefly discusses background information that provides the context for the introduction of the TPA process in Ontario. Further, the chapter presents the problem statement and the purpose of the study. Next, the chapter also presents the conceptual framework that guided the research and data analysis. The scope and limitations of the study are also identified. Finally, this chapter concludes by providing a brief outline of the organization of this research study.

### **Background and Context**

O'Sullivan (1999), in his conceptual research, states that, "in some respects Canadian education has been responding to global change for more than a century. In

recent times, two global paradigms have influenced the course of educational reforms in Ontario and Canada” (p. 311). The first paradigm of *global economic competitiveness* maintains that knowledge has become a competitive asset, and countries compete with each other in improving their education system so their citizens become better and can compete with citizens of other countries. In this paradigm, educational efforts are directed towards improving knowledge and skills in science and technology, math, and language (O’Sullivan, 1999). The second paradigm is that of *global interdependence*, which argues that countries acknowledge their interdependence in meeting global needs and responsibilities and consequently, education should reflect these values. This paradigm values the interdependence of global politics, cultures, environment, and ethics, in addition to its focus on science and technology (O’Sullivan, 1999). The paradigm of global competitiveness has been prominent since the 1960s, while the interdependence paradigm gained prominence in education in the 1980s and 1990s. Leithwood and Earl (2000) argue that the majority of educational reforms in 1990s, especially those in developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, focused on holding schools more accountable to society, and they trace the reasons for such phenomenon to the impact of the existing economic, social, and political contexts of the society of the particular education system in question. Leithwood and Earl (2000) further note that the measures of accountability presumably had two consequences: one, the purpose of schools and the aspirations of people would be better aligned, and two, the performance of schools is expected to improve in traditional achievement criteria.

According to Jones (2004), during the 1980s and 1990s, education reforms have been significant in many developed, English- speaking countries such as the United

Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, although Ontario, Canada undertook modest changes in education policies from 1970 to 1995. However, there were substantial changes in education policies between 1995 and 2003, owing to the neo-liberal initiatives undertaken by the conservative government led by Mike Harris. *Neo-liberalism* is a synthesis of perspectives from both liberal and conservative ideologies that advocates for cutting public spending on education, the implementation of free market principles that promote increased accountability, and increased intervention from governments on education. In this model, governments ascribe the blame to schools and school systems for the economic failures of the society (Sadovnik, Cookson, Jr., & Semel, 2013). According to Levin (2007, 2010), owing to the government measures from the early 1990s to early 2000s, education in Ontario faced several problems, including offended teachers, lower teacher morale, strikes and ‘work to rule’ campaigns, increased teacher turnover, and the removal of Principals and Vice-Principals from teacher unions. Owing to the budget cuts, the government reduced teacher staff levels, which in turn, led to increased workload on teachers, in addition to introducing compulsory pencil-and-paper tests for new teachers and a more intensive teacher evaluation program (Levin, 2010).

In December 2001, the Ontario government passed the Quality in the Classroom Act, 2001. This act established performance appraisal standards and processes for school boards. The new legislation established both a framework and mandatory requirements for teacher appraisal systems, thus resulting in introducing TPA (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002). As per the TPA manual, the purposes of the TPA system are:

- to ensure that students receive the benefit of an education system staffed by teachers who are performing their duties satisfactorily

- to provide for fair, effective, and consistent teacher evaluation in every school
- to promote professional growth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 3)

At the outset of the implementation of the TPA policy, experienced teachers were required to undergo an evaluation once every three years; new teachers, then, were required to undergo an evaluation twice in each of their first and second years of service. There were two evaluations required during an evaluation year. Principals or Vice-Principals could conduct the evaluation process.

The process of evaluation begins with a pre-observation meeting between the Principal or Vice-Principal and the teacher, followed by a classroom observation on a mutually-agreed date and time. After the classroom observation, the Principal or Vice-Principal conducts a post-observation meeting to discuss the classroom observation and follow-up. During this meeting, a learning plan for the teacher is finalized, the teacher's inputs are recorded, and a summative report of the evaluation is prepared. Teachers are given a rating, and an explanation is given for the rating assigned by the administrator (Larsen, 2009). The ratings include: *exemplary*, *good*, *satisfactory*, and *unsatisfactory* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002).

In the initial years of implementation of the TPA policy, there were several challenges including resistance from teachers and teachers' unions, and disagreement from teachers with the evaluation ratings. For example, Larsen (2009) argues that "...the TPA process was disorganized, inconsistently conducted and above all, unfair" (p. 24). Larsen (2009) continues to explain that the TPA process created an environment of anxiety among teachers, and only a minor proportion of teachers considered the process to be effective and useful to their development and growth.



In 2003, the Liberal Party was elected under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty. The new government, unlike its predecessor, showed a non-punitive attitude towards teachers, and worked with them collaboratively to achieve the goals of the province (Fullan, 2015). Eventually, in 2007, the TPA policy was modified. According to the revised TPA Manual (2010), the goals of the new system are:

- promote teacher development
- provide meaningful appraisals of teachers' performance that encourage professional learning and growth
- identify opportunities for additional support where required
- provide a measure of accountability to the public (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 5)

In the new system, experienced teachers are evaluated once every five years, and new teachers are evaluated twice, only in their first year. Among the modifications to the policy included the revision that the number of evaluations was reduced to only one evaluation during the evaluation year (for experienced teachers) and that the number of evaluation ratings was reduced from four categories to only two: satisfactory and unsatisfactory. TPA is still practiced in schools in Ontario, and it appears that now, TPA has been accepted by teachers and administrators as a measure of accountability.

### **Problem Statement**

Research conducted by Larsen (2009) and Barnett (2012) on the TPA process from teachers' perspectives indicates that the process has challenges, and the process is not conducted fairly and consistently. Teachers perceived the TPA as an ineffective, negative process. A study conducted on administrators' perspectives by Maharaj (2014)

also indicates that there are challenges for administrators in conducting the process. Maharaj's (2014) study identifies that classroom observations did not assess teacher practice adequately, and most of the participants felt that the process did not contribute to improvement in teacher practice. Given these observations, there is a need to conduct further research on the TPA to gain a better understanding of the process, specifically with more recent information.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of retired administrators on the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario in terms of how the process was conducted, the challenges they faced in conducting the process, and how they perceive the usefulness of the process. Specifically, the study sought to examine the perspectives of retired administrators who were in service when TPA was introduced in Ontario as a means of promoting teacher development, professional learning, and also as a measure of accountability in education. The study aimed to identify how retired administrators perceive the TPA process in terms of its usefulness and effectiveness in fulfilling its objectives.

### **Research Question**

The main research question that guided the study is: what are the perspectives of retired Principals on the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario? The study explored whether the process was perceived to add value to teachers, and thereby, to schools and students. The following sub-questions guided the development of the interview questions:

1. What are the overall opinions of retired Principals on the TPA process?

2. How effective did they perceive the feedback given to teachers after an evaluation was?
3. How did the TPA process impact teacher and Principal professional relationship?
4. What were the challenges they perceived in conducting the TPA process?
5. What are the recommendations of retired Principals for improving the TPA process?

Apart from these sub-questions, the study also explored the quality of training provided to Principals in conducting the TPA process, how fairly and consistently the evaluations were conducted, and whether the retired Principals recommend the process be continued in future. For instance, the TPA process is conducted on a specific pre-arranged date and time, and it is not evident from research whether the one-time feedback given after evaluation is productive.

### **Rationale**

Principals and Vice-Principals are responsible for conducting the TPA; thus, it is critical to understand their opinion on the effectiveness of the process. The majority of the previous research studies on the TPA were conducted before the TPA process was amended in 2007 (Maharaj, 2014). Also, there is a paucity of research on the views of administrators, and further research is needed from administrators' perspectives (Larsen, 2009). Recently, Maharaj (2014) conducted a study on administrators' views on the process; however, the study was a survey. In order to gain a deeper understanding of administrators' views, this research study interviewed retired Principals to gain a deeper understanding on the effectiveness of the TPA process. The assumption is that recently

retired administrators' perspectives are representative of those of the administrators in service.

The reason this study employed interviews of retired administrators is that they are now relieved of their professional burdens. Previous studies conducted on the TPA resonate the fact that the process is time-consuming and poses a significant challenge in terms of time management for Principals; hence, this study chose to interview retired Principals. Retired Principals are presumably less occupied than working Principals; so, participating in a study would not interfere with their daily professional routines and responsibilities. Also, retired administrators would have seen the TPA process evolve from the time it was introduced until recent times and thus, they can share their historical experiences and perspectives to gain a better understanding of the process and how it is perceived in schools. Three retired Principals and one retired Vice-Principal participated in this study. Three out of the four participants retired in the last 2 to 3 years; hence, their perspectives and experiences would be recent and relevant to the study.

### **Scope and Limitations**

One of the limitations of the study is the scale of the study. The study involved only four participants, so the information gathered may not be generalizable or representative of a large population. Given the constraint of time, it was also not possible to gauge the effectiveness of the TPA process comprehensively. Despite that fact, the findings of the study would help in gaining information about the effectiveness of TPA. The findings of this study can help form the basis for a broader study to identify the opinions of Principals from across the province if a quantitative study were to follow this study. Other limitation is that all the participants in this study spent the majority of their

career in Southern Ontario, specifically in Catholic school boards. The study would gain more relevance if the participants were selected from different regions of Ontario, and from a variety of public school boards. Another limitation is that the study considered only retired Principals. A study involving working Principals would bring more current information to the fore.

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Document**

Chapter Two presents an overview of literature relevant to the purpose and scope of this study. The chapter provides information in two sections, namely:

- Developments in Education in Ontario
- Teacher Evaluation

In the first section, the concept of accountability in education is presented, with information from the literature related to this concept specifically referring to America and Canada. In the second section, information about the recent education reforms undertaken in Ontario, and their relative success and failure, is presented. In the third section, a review of previous literature on the TPA process is presented.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research methodology employed in this study. This chapter presents information about the rationale of selecting this study's specific methodology: a basic qualitative methodology. This chapter then discusses the rationale for the selection of the study's site, participants, its specific instruments for collecting data, the method of data collection, and the data analysis process. Specifically, the rationale to select one-on-one interviews and open-ended questions to collect data are presented. The limitations and scope of the study are also discussed in this chapter. This chapter concludes by explaining the measures taken by the researchers to ensure that the

study was conducted ethically as per the guidelines specified by the Research Ethics Board at Brock University.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. This chapter begins with a brief background of the participants. The data collected during the interviews is analyzed and presented in five sections that each represent a sub-question of the study. The rationale for this approach is also explained in the chapter.

Lastly, Chapter Five includes a summary of the study, along with a detailed discussion on the findings. A conclusion to the study is presented, along with suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study examined the perspectives of retired administrators on the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. This chapter reviews the literature related to the context of the study. The literature review is presented in two sections. The first section discusses the developments in education in the last three decades, with examples from the America and Ontario, Canada; here, neo-liberal principles played a vital role in the education reforms, and developments during this time promoted the concept of accountability in education, which are reviewed. The second section summarizes the literature related to the teacher evaluation process in Ontario.

### Developments in Education in the Last Three Decades

According to Hunt (2014), change efforts over the past few decades can be categorized into three movements, namely, the *excellence movement*, the *restructuring movement*, and the *standards movement*. These movements display differing degrees of accountability measures being employed, and the flexibility given to school administrators in formulating their change efforts. The *excellence movement* observed in the 1980s, for instance, promoted the concept of experimenting with teaching conditions, expanding instructional hours, and extending school years in order to improve the education system. This was a top-down approach implemented by the Department of Education with minimal influence or freedom at the implementation level (Hunt, 2014). Moving forward, the *restructuring movement* emerged from the *excellence movement*; unlike its predecessor, the *restructuring movement* was less rigid and gave elbowroom to the school districts in managing their change efforts (Hunt, 2014). Lastly, the *standards*

*movement* is the most recent of the movements, which gives more flexibility and opportunity for the building-level administrators to be involved in school improvement (Hunt, 2014).

These movements coincide with Peck and Reitzug's (2012) observation about the concepts and terminology of business management entering into the field of education. According to Peck and Reitzug (2012), three major concepts of business management have seeped into education management and leadership: these terms are *management by objectives* (MBO), *total quality management* (TQM), and *turnaround*. MBO was predominant in business sectors in the late 1960s, and became almost extinct by the late 1990s. Then, TQM came into existence in education in the 1980s, but faded in a few years. It emphasized the significance of outcomes and accountability. TQM existed in the business world between the 1950s and 1990s, and promoted and advocated for the concepts of customer focus, continuous improvement, and the creation of effective systems to maximize worker performance (Peck & Reitzug, 2012). These principles coincide with the ideology of neo-liberalism, which devoted attention to the maximization of value and free market practices. Based on the observations of Peck and Reitzug, it is plausible, then, to imply that the different phases of education reform coincide with the ideologies of the existing business concepts at the time.

To put the observations of different movements and the influence of business concepts on education into perspective, it is worthwhile to discuss how the education system was managed in terms of change and reform in both America and Ontario. America implemented measures that were more inclined towards outcomes and the maximization of value for the dollars spent on the education system from the 1980s until



the recent past; meanwhile, in Ontario, the progressive conservatives that ruled the province between 1995 and 2003 were more focused on an outcomes-based approach. Consequently, from 2003 onwards, the Liberals, under the leadership of McGuinty, focused on capacity building for the improvement of the education system and were able to succeed in providing high-quality education. Now, Ontario stands among one of the best education systems globally (Fullan, 2015).

Educational accountability is a function of the relationship between the key stakeholders, namely taxpayers, elected officials, and teachers (Volante, 2007). In America, the main motto of educational accountability represents the neo-liberal approach, in which the goals are to reduce the spending on education, and increase the accountability of the stakeholders – especially teachers and school administrators. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a wave of reform introduced during the Bush administration in 2002, is an apt example (Fullan, 2015). NCLB was introduced as a measure to reduce the gaps in learning for minority and low-income students, and to improve the standards of education – the concept of ‘raising the bar to bridge the gap.’ NCLB requires school systems to follow high-stakes testing as a standard measure of student success, and it penalizes the schools that fall behind in achieving results. This punitive approach, however, could not get sustainable results in improving the education system, and as a consequence, the situation of American education seems to be deteriorating.

Fullan (2015) presented three central measures that an education system needs to consider in order to succeed in creating long-lasting solutions: *pushing accountability*, *providing incentives*, and *fostering capacity building*. The education leaders in America appear to have focused squarely on pushing accountability, and to some extent, on

providing incentives; however, they do not seem to have focused their resources and efforts on capacity building. The major flaw with NCLB appears to be its inconsistency and ironical concept: NCLB insists on increasing student success at the national level, but the standards for success are not streamlined, as they are laid out by individual states. This appears, then, to be inconsistent, as the standards to measure student performance and student success differ greatly from state to state, and it is thus not easy to compare the students' performance at a national level (Hursh, 2007). In this system, American schools will be categorized as *need to improve*, *take corrective action*, and *to restructure* based on the failure in meeting NCLB requirements for two years, four years, and five years respectively. This punitive approach made the situation worse, as the schools were focused mainly on earning test score results – and that compromised the quality of learning. NCLB provides a very good example, then, of a reform that focuses on the parameters of accountability. Fullan (2015) describes such accountability as *external accountability*, as the NCLB advocates for structural changes and quick solutions to the problems; however, it could not succeed in taking the reform deep into the culture of school systems as needed.

Ontario, on the other hand, provides a contrasting example of a sustainable systemic improvement that occurred from 2003 until the present time. Ontario witnessed drastic education reform efforts between the years of 1995 and 2003 under the Harris government. The Education Quality Improvement Act (Bill 160) passed by the Harris government reflects the neo-liberal objective of reduced spending on public services, and brings about consumerism in society (Greenberg, 2004). The Harris government reduced the education budget, reduced hiring new teachers, thus resulting in increased workload

for employed teachers, and introduced accountability measures that eventually laid the blame for any errors in the education system on teachers and school boards (Fullan, 2015; Greenberg, 2004; Hargreaves, Shaw, Fink, Giles, & Moore, 2002; Levin, 2007). Due to these punitive measures, teachers across Ontario engaged in a two-week strike to protest the change efforts being conducted by the government (Fullan, 2015; Greenberg, 2004; Levin, 2007). The education system under this government did not show any signs of improvement.

In 2003, however, the Liberal Party formed a new government under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty, with a strong focus to “turnaround” the education system in the province (Fullan, 2015; Levin, 2007). Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) assert that it is important and necessary to consider historical perspectives on educational change if governments intend to create sustainable reforms – and McGuinty’s approach towards reforming Ontario education system resonates with this observation. The Ontario government created an action plan with fewer ambitious, yet still achievable goals, including increasing the literacy and numeracy rates of students to 75%, and increasing the graduation rate of high school students to 85%. They followed a collaborative, comprehensive approach that involves capacity building at all levels (Fullan, 2015; Levin, Glaze, & Fullan, 2008). Ontario succeeded in reforming the education system, owing to the sustained commitment of the government. Unlike in other countries or provinces, the Ontario government did not hold schools, teachers, and students solely accountable for student performance; rather, the government made itself accountable by setting provincial targets for student success (Sattler, 2012). The McGuinty government created an environment that respected staff and professional knowledge, increased the

number of teachers, thereby reducing their workload, and enforced minimal accountability measures which, as evidenced by NCLB, are not associated with student performance (Fullan, 2015; Levin 2007; Levin, Glaze, & Fullan, 2008). These goals were spread over a period of time, and the government increased the budget for education – much unlike other governments and countries that cut budgets and desired quick solutions to urgent problems (Fullan, 2015).

In order to achieve these goals, the Ontario government instituted the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) to improve the literacy and numeracy of students in the province. Ontario created a positive environment for teachers and established a collaborative partnership with teachers and teacher unions in executing the goals of reform in an effective way. The government also negotiated with teacher unions and reach an agreement to institute 4-year contracts for teachers to ensure a stable work environment (Fullan, 2015; Levin, 2007). Instead of using accountability measures to reward and punish teachers for student success, then, the government focused on support and capacity building. They created a collaborative, collective culture that would work for the goals they set out, even though there may be some disagreements (Fullan, 2015; Levin, 2007). This concept is known as *internal accountability*, a system in which all stakeholders work collaboratively to achieve their goals by using a collective approach (Fullan, 2015). This can be related to the concept of *whole system improvement* proposed by Fullan (2015). Fullan (2015) describes three major components of whole system improvement: *capacity building*, *professional development*, and *high-quality curriculum material and resources*. Thus, Ontario focused on a few key goals and stayed committed to them, rather than taking up multiple tasks that would impede the overall reform.

The second characteristic of Ontario's education reform is a concentration on capacity building. The Ontario government brought all stakeholders under a common consensus to work for system improvement, and thus created a peaceful and stable environment. In developing the new reform policies, the McGuinty government transformed the power relations between government and the education system; instead of demonstrating and enforcing the power of government, they shared the power with all stakeholders. Unlike other countries and provinces, Ontario was not fixated on targets. Such a stringent focus on targets may bring change in structures, but it may not bring about the necessary change in culture that is essential for system changes (Fullan, 2015). Ultimately, Ontario focused on bringing a change in educational culture rather than a change in educational structure. Unlike the previous governments, the McGuinty government put less emphasis on neo-liberal accountability measures. This observation coincides with Fullan's (2015) idea that "internal accountability must precede external accountability..." (p. 231) in order to create sustainable development in a system. Finally, Ontario did not institute punitive accountability measures that could potentially erode the motivation of teachers. By following these careful measures, Ontario thus succeeded in implementing change in its education system, and ultimately improved it; moreover, Ontario has been successful in sustaining the improvements and reforms for a considerable period of time.

### **Teacher Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation was not given much importance in the past, as the main attention and focus of school improvement measures was on improving curriculum and new methods of school management rather than improving the quality of teachers

(Darling-Hammond, 1990). Since the 1980s, it has been believed that improving the quality of teachers is as important as improving curricula and school reforms (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Teacher evaluation is considered one way of improving the quality of teachers. Policies for the formal evaluation of teachers are common in most developed nations. According to Young and Levin (2002), teacher evaluation has two purposes. One purpose is that the evaluation helps teachers in improving their teaching abilities; this evaluation is called a *formative evaluation*. The other purpose of evaluation is that it helps to identify and manage teachers who do not meet the acceptable performance standards; this evaluation is called *summative evaluation* (Young & Levin, 2002). Natriello (1990) states that there are three purposes to teacher evaluation: first, to influence the performance of individuals; second, to control the movement of teachers into or out of positions or the profession; and third, to legitimate the organizational control systems.

Larsen (2009), in her mixed method study conducted by interviewing 25 teachers and surveying 125 teachers from Ontario, identified that the majority of her respondents perceived that the TPA process has negatively impacted the professional relationship between them and their administrators. Similarly, the vast majority of her respondents felt that they did not have the support they expected from their administrators. In the same study, a number of respondents expressed their frustration about the lack of subject matter expertise exemplified by their administrators. Larsen's (2009) participants also indicated that the ratings given to them by their administrators were not fair and were inconsistent. Several participants mentioned that their administrators were reluctant to give the rating of *exemplary* to teachers. Many respondents of this study also expressed

their dissatisfaction about the classroom observation by their administrators; for instance, the administrators were either late to the observation class or they left early. Teachers felt, then, that they were not given due attention during the TPA process. Lastly, many respondents felt that the relationship between them and their administrators deteriorated after the process, as they felt that they perceived themselves to be driven by the administrators. The relationship can be compared to that between a boss and a subordinate, rather than between two colleagues.

Overall, Larsen's (2009) study indicated that teachers were stressed by the TPA process, and they felt that the process was unfair, disorganized, and inconsistent. This study was conducted in 2006 and 2007; therefore, it depicted a picture of teachers' perceptions of the TPA process in the early years of its implementation. This study revealed that only a few teachers believed that this process was productive and promoted their professional growth. For the majority of the teachers in the study, this process was full of skepticism and mistrust; however, Larsen (2009) indicated that after the modifications made in 2007, the revised TPA process addressed some of the concerns expressed by her respondents. Now, teachers feel less stressed and frustrated by the process (Larsen, 2009).

Barnett (2012) conducted a study to identify whether it is possible to conduct the TPA process in a consistent manner. This study is based on the perceptions of 9 teachers who were interviewed. This study examined teachers' experiences of whether the administrators conducted the evaluations in a timely manner, whether the administrators were prompt in giving feedback, and whether the administrators gave due attention to the teachers. The findings of the study reveal that the process was not conducted in a

consistent manner, and also, in the given format of the TPA, it is not possible to conduct the evaluations of teachers in a fair and consistent way. Barnette (2012) concludes that it is unrealistic to expect that all teacher evaluations could – and should – be run in exactly the same way. For instance, there may be an emergency in school that the Principal needs to address; in this situation, the Principal's attention to the evaluation may be divided. Similarly, a teacher may be experiencing a stressful day on the day of evaluation, so it would be unfair to imply that the teacher is incompetent based solely on the one evaluation conducted on that day. Hence, the evaluation process for teachers needs to assess the teachers correctly rather than focusing merely on completing the paperwork involved. The developmental needs of teachers must thus be given priority over completing the formal, administrative process of evaluation (Barnett, 2012).

In an older study conducted on teachers' and Principals' views on the perceived degree of improvement in teacher performance as a result of performance appraisals, Hickcox, Lawton, Leithwood, and Musella (1988) indicated a significant difference in the perceptions of Principals and teachers. Principals, for instance, viewed the appraisal process as having an impact on teachers' improvement; meanwhile, teachers believed that the appraisals had little to no impact on their practice. Building on this, Maharaj (2014) conducted a study on educational administrators' perspectives on the effectiveness of the TPA process. This study involved a survey of 178 administrators from Ontario. It found that the training given to administrators in conducting the TPA process was not extensive. For instance, administrators were given training on the technical components of the process, but were not trained in identifying ways to accurately evaluate and assess teachers. Many respondents indicated that the observation time for the evaluation was



also not sufficient enough to make an accurate assessment. In addition, the majority of the respondents recommended that a teacher's evaluation must include a higher number of classroom observations. Lastly, the study also revealed that administrators were supportive of the idea of unscheduled or unannounced classroom observations.

Moreover, Maharaj (2014) found that the majority of respondents felt that the TPA process did not impact teacher and administrator relationships negatively. Conversely, this observation is contradictory to the majority of teachers' perceptions from the study conducted by Larsen (2009). Maharaj's (2014) study also indicated that predominantly, an administrator's evaluation and rating are accepted by the evaluated teacher, and the administrators are rarely challenged, especially after the TPA was modified in 2007. Also, the majority of respondents in this study expressed that they did not have to give an unsatisfactory rating to a teacher they evaluated, and that the TPA process is effective at highlighting exemplary teachers; however, respondents noted that the TPA process is ineffective at identifying mediocre or under-performing teachers. Maharaj (2014) continued that, overall, the TPA process was not an effective process to improve teachers and their performance; rather, teacher development occurred due to ongoing professional development programs conducted in schools. This observation is quite plausible, as there is no further follow-up with a teacher after he or she is given a satisfactory rating on their TPA. The TPA feedback system is helpful to only a handful of teachers that received an unsatisfactory rating. Maharaj (2014) also indicated that it was not easy to discontinue a teacher from the profession when the teacher received an unsatisfactory rating, largely due to the involvement of teacher unions. The most common challenge expressed by the study participants was the paucity of time for

administrators: they felt the process was very time-consuming. The most common recommendation from the participants was to thus increase the frequency of evaluations. They felt that the TPA should occur more frequently than merely once every five years. This observation is, however, contradictory to the time challenge of the TPA process and the difficulty in allocating time for conducting evaluations.

Based on the previous studies conducted by Larsen (2009), Barnett (2012), and Maharaj (2014), it appears that the perspectives of teachers and those of administrators vary to a great extent. Teachers felt the TPA process was negative, while administrators felt it was positive and helpful. Moreover, teachers wanted a reduced number of evaluations, while administrators recommended having more frequent evaluations. These contradictory observations therefore suggest the need for more research in this area.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study examined the perspectives of retired administrators on the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario. This chapter presented an overview of related literature pertaining to the study. The chapter was presented in two sections: first, the developments and reforms in education, with specific examples from Ontario and America, were discussed to lay contextual groundwork, and then, the purposes of teacher evaluation and how the TPA process is practiced in Ontario was reviewed.

The review of the literature indicated that the concept of accountability has gained prominence in education in the past two to three decades. Ontario has seen drastic developments in education during the Conservative government's leadership from 1995 to 2003, and this period marks the initiation of a punitive approach to education from the governments. A liberal government, formed in 2003, gave a new direction to the existing

structures and instead, followed a non-punitive approach to education. Here, then, Ontario worked on capacity building as opposed to merely working towards achieving accountability measures.

The TPA process was introduced in 2002 by the Conservative government under the leadership of Mike Harris. The TPA process created several problems for both teachers and administrators alike. Teachers were frustrated with the new process, and they did not see much value from the process in terms of their own professional development; on the other hand, while administrators felt that the process is time-consuming and requires overwhelming effort, they see potential in the process and recommend that the process is actually conducted more frequently. These contradictory observations from teachers and administrators thus indicates the need for further research to gain a better understanding of TPA.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study intends to explore the perspectives of retired Principals on the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario. This chapter discusses the research methodology employed in the study, in terms of the rationale for selecting the specific research design, recruiting a specific set of participants, utilizing instruments for data collection, and the process of data analysis. This chapter also describes the measures taken to meet the ethical considerations expected of the study, and also it describes briefly the scope and limitations of the study.

#### Methodology and Research Design

This study identifies perspectives of retired Principals regarding the effectiveness of the TPA process. Hence, it is appropriate to employ a qualitative approach for this study, as it seeks to explore the perspectives of participants on a process or phenomenon (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Creswell (2015) emphasizes that qualitative research helps in exploring a research question or problem in order to develop a deeper and detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. This study will help in developing a deeper and more detailed understanding of the TPA process in schools in Ontario.

Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Walker (2014) state that *basic qualitative studies* "... provide rich descriptive accounts targeted to understanding a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspective of those involved" (p. 84). Ary et al. (2014) continue to emphasize that basic qualitative studies are simplistic when compared to other qualitative approaches such as case studies, ethnography, and phenomenology.

Basic studies provide an opportunity to understand, describe, and interpret the experiences and perspectives of others.

Three retired Principals and one retired Vice-Principal from the Ontario region were interviewed to explore and answer the research questions about the perceptions and experiences of retired administrators on the effectiveness of the TPA process. In order to understand the views of retired administrators, this study employed one-on-one interviews to collect data. According to Plano, Clark, and Creswell (2015), one-on-one interviews, “are the best way to learn in depth about the perceptions and experiences of single individuals” (p. 340). Creswell (2015) observes that, “one on one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share their ideas comfortably” (p. 217). The participants in this study are retired administrators who are experienced professionals, and they can articulate their experiences and perspectives effectively and share them comfortably; hence, one-on-one interviews are appropriate for this study.

In an in-person one-on-one interview, the content of the information discussed – *the focus* – and the manner in which it is done – *the frame* – are critical in successfully conducting the interview (Scott & Usher, 2011). Scott and Usher (2011) elaborate on this by stating that, “focus is defined as the extent to which the original agenda of the interviewer is adhered to; frame, on the other hand, is understood as the way in which that agenda is realized” (p. 117). Scott and Usher (2011) further emphasize that an interview with both a strong focus and a strong frame would put the interviewer in command, thus minimizing the flexibility to the interviewees in expressing their views in an unrestrained manner. On the other hand, a weak focus and weak frame will provide

more scope for interviewees to express themselves, with limited influence from the interviewer. Semi-structured interviews are weak in focus and frame; thus, they provide an opportunity for conducting interviews with limited control of the interviewer on the content and context of the interview (Scott & Usher, 2011).

The researcher chose to conduct interviews in a semi-structured manner in order to better understand the views of retired administrators in an unrestrained way so that they can share their perspectives without any influence or bias of the researcher's preconceived notions or ideas. In interviewing the retired administrators, the researcher used open-ended questions so that the participants could create their own options in providing responses to the questions, without being forced to choose a predetermined response provided by the interviewer. Open-ended questions allow the participants to voice their opinions and experiences in an unconstrained way, thus minimizing the influence of researchers (Plano, Clark & Creswell, 2015).

### **Site and Participant Selection**

To gain a deeper understanding of the policy and practice of the TPA process in Ontario, it is essential to collect the perspectives and experiences of individuals who have a background in conducting this process. The researcher chose to interview three retired Principals and one retired Vice-Principal from Ontario to understand their perspectives on the effectiveness of the TPA process. The selection criteria for participants for the study included that participants a) had to be in service at the time of introduction of the TPA in 2002, and b) they need at least two years of experience conducting TPA in either a high school or an elementary school. The rationale to select retired administrators lies in the fact that retired Principals were in service at the time of the introduction of the

TPA policy; thus, they had implemented the policy themselves for several years, and could provide rich and insightful perspectives on the TPA policy and practice.

Additionally, retired Principals are relieved of their professional burdens, meaning they could reflect more honestly on their past career when responding to the interview questions.

The study used *convenience sampling* (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) to select the first two participants, and a *snowball approach* (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) to select the other two participants. The researcher contacted the first two participants through email to enquire about their willingness to participate in the study. Upon completing the interviews, the two participants referred the other two participants, who were contacted through emails. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), using *convenience sampling* to select participants may limit the opportunity to generalize the findings of the study. This study does not intend to generalize the findings of the study; hence, this approach to select participants is appropriate.

### **Data Collection**

The interview questions of this study were designed based on the results of previous studies on the TPA process. In his study, for instance, Maharaj (2014) identified a few themes such as a lack of training for administrators on the TPA process, paucity of time for administrators to conduct the evaluations, and the impact of the TPA on teachers. Larsen (2009) and Barnett (2012) also both conducted studies on the perceptions of teachers on the TPA process, and argue that there were inconsistencies in the implementation of the process. The interview questions in this study were developed to

answer the research sub-questions that were broadly aligned with the findings in the aforementioned studies.

Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Interview guides were sent to participants before the interviews were scheduled in order to give the participants an opportunity to review the main questions, with the intention for them to be informed of what to expect during the interviews. Three interviews were conducted in a quiet study room or a classroom at Brock University, and one interview was conducted in a local library study room. Each interview lasted for 40 to 50 minutes. The conversations were digitally recorded for accurately recording information expressed by the participants. Once the interviews were completed, the audio-recorded interview data were transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were then emailed to participants within four weeks after the interviews were conducted. All the participants acknowledged their receipt of transcripts, and they provided some additional information.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data collection process concluded, the researcher began data analysis by listening to the audio recordings several times to manually transcribe the interview conversations, and also to get a general sense of the conversations. Upon completing the transcription of all the interview data, the researcher started reading the transcripts repeatedly to identify key ideas expressed by the interviewees regarding the TPA process and its practice. A few clusters of key information were identified and highlighted in the text, and short notes to identify codes were made in the margins of the transcript documents. The code words for the key information identified were: *ineffective*,



*challenges, subject area, fulfilling requirements, cohesive communication, time constraints, resistance, collegial support, accountability, dialogue for development, lack of feedback, overwhelming, and recommendations.*

In the process of further analysis, the key information from the codes was developed into broad themes that corresponded to the sub-questions of the study. The themes identified in the study are presented in the following clusters of information:

1. Overall opinion on the effectiveness of the TPA
2. The feedback mechanism after the appraisals
3. The impact of TPA on the relationships between teachers and administrators
4. Challenges encountered in conducting the process
5. The suggestions or recommendations offered by retired administrators in improving the process

### **Measures for Rigor**

Ary et al. (2014) assert that in qualitative studies, the validity and reliability of the data are essential, and the data must be rigorous. In this research study, the researcher took measures to ensure that the data collection and analysis was done rigorously. For instance, all the interviews were digitally recorded to ensure that the data were collected accurately from the participants. Upon transcribing the audio-tapes of the interviews, a copy of transcript was emailed to the respective participants so that they could review the data to verify the accuracy of the information, and also so that they could suggest any changes or improvements to provide more credibility to the data. This is an example of performing a *member check* (Plano, Clark, & Creswell, 2015).

Plano, Clark, and Creswell (2015) argue that, “the credibility of a study is enhanced when the selected participants have direct experience with the central phenomenon, the data represent different perspectives and types of sources, and accurate recordings of the data are made during the data collection” (p. 348). The participants in this study are retired Principals who have firsthand experience conducting the TPA process. All the interviews were digitally recorded to collect the data accurately. These measures thus add to the credibility of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research study has received clearance from the Brock University Research Ethics Review Board (#16-006-SYDOR). Upon receipt of REB clearance, the data collection procedures commenced. The researcher laid out the guidelines and information clearly for the participants before and during the interviews, and took appropriate measures in obtaining informed consent from the participants. All the participants were informed that participation in the interviews was voluntary, and in the case that they did not choose to participate in the study, there would be no consequences or impact on the relationship that existed with the researchers of this study. Participants were also aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they chose. Measures were taken to protect the confidentiality of information of the participants, and their identity is protected. Pseudonyms were used for participants during both data collection and analysis.

Interview invitation letters were sent to the participants through email, which outlined the purpose of the study and the potential benefits and risks involved in participating in the study. Appropriate measures were taken in obtaining informed

consent from the participants. The researcher orally described the purpose of the study and the rationale behind it to the participants during the in-person meetings for the interviews. All data related to the study are stored on a password-protected computer. Only the student investigator and the supervisor have the access to data.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the information related to the research methodology and design, the selection of the site and participants, the means of data collection, the data analysis process, the scope and limitations of the study, and the measures taken to conduct the study in an ethical manner.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

This research study examined the perspectives of retired Principals on the effectiveness of TPA in Ontario. Three retired Principals and one retired Vice-Principal participated in this study. The study employed a basic qualitative research methodology. The researcher collected data by conducting semi-structured in-person interviews, in which the overall direction of the conversations was guided by the researcher, with flexibility for the participants to voice their opinions in an unconstrained manner. Participants were asked open-ended questions so that they could articulate their responses effectively and provide information relevant to the research questions. Interview conversations were digitally recorded, and transcripts were sent to the participants to corroborate the information. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to keep participants' information confidential. This chapter provides a brief background of the participants, and a synthesis of the responses from the participants of the study as it relates to the overarching research question and sub-questions. The results are presented in five sections, each representing a sub-question of the study and the corresponding responses collected from the participants.

### **Background of Participants**

Alex (a pseudonym) is the first participant of the study. Alex retired in 2005 after working for nearly 35 years in elementary schools progressively as a teacher, a Vice-Principal, and a Principal. He worked in the Southern Ontario region at the time of his retirement. He was also a member of the provincial committee that formulated the TPA

process before it was implemented in 2002. Alex had experience conducting TPA for 2 years before he retired. He currently works as an Instructor at a university in Ontario.

The second participant, Ben (a pseudonym), worked his entire career in elementary schools in Southern Ontario. He retired recently after working as a teacher for about 10 years, and as a Principal for 22 years. He has experience conducting TPA since 2002, and has shared his experiences of conducting the TPA in both the first phase of its implementation and after its modifications in 2007. Ben currently works as an Instructor in a teacher education program at a university in Ontario.

John (a pseudonym) is the third participant in the study. John worked in various elementary schools in a large city in Ontario. He retired recently after serving as a Principal in an elementary school in Southern Ontario. John has experience conducting the TPA process since it was introduced in 2002.

The fourth and final participant in the study, Tim (a pseudonym), is a retired Vice-Principal. Tim retired recently from a school board in Southern Ontario after working for about 32 years. Tim had the opportunity to experience TPA from both ends: as a teacher who was evaluated, and as a Vice-Principal who evaluated other teachers. Most of Tim's career had been spent in high schools. He taught French and Music. Tim currently teaches students in a teacher education program at a university in Ontario.

The four participants, even though they all worked in Catholic schools, had diverse experiences with administering the TPA system. One of them was a member in the provincial committee that formulated the TPA policy; another had experience being both an evaluated teacher and an evaluator. All participants have worked in different geographical regions in Ontario. Some of them have experience working in elementary

schools, while others worked in high schools. They shared their experiences and perspectives related to the effectiveness of the TPA process in this study, thus representing a diversity of experience. In this chapter, a synthesis of the key information from the themes identified in the data analysis is presented in five sections that each represent the five sub-questions of this study. Additional information gathered apart from the sub-questions is also presented.

### **Overall Opinion on the Process**

All the participants shared their opinion about the TPA process, their overall experience conducting the TPA, and their broad opinion on the effectiveness of the process. Alex states that at the outset, he was not happy with the TPA policy when it was introduced in 2002. He was a part of the provincial committee that initiated the TPA policy, and participated in discussions on policy formulation. He believed that the final policy was not representative of what had been discussed in the meetings. For instance, during the meetings of the provincial committee, parent groups insisted that teacher evaluations should be conducted once each year, while the teacher unions proposed to have teacher evaluations conducted once every five years. In the final policy that was adopted, the policy-makers decided to conduct teacher evaluation once every three years. Alex suggested that the policy implementation had been a ‘top down’ approach. He also noted significant resistance from teachers against the TPA process, and felt that it was very cumbersome, and that many teachers and administrators considered it a bureaucratic mandate that was not connected to the real life of school. He stated that,

I felt that was a very cumbersome process, and I could have achieved more if left to my own devices as a Principal working with teachers in the classroom. So, I felt

like it was a bureaucratic mandate that really wasn't connected to the real life of what goes on in a school.

He also considered this process of giving a mark or score (rating) to a teacher as being 'old-fashioned' and 'ineffective.'

Ben had experience conducting the TPA from 2002 to 2015, and experienced both positive and negative feelings about the process. He observed that there was a lot of "why?" being asked among teachers in the first couple of years of the TPA implementation. Many experienced teachers, for instance, were resistant to the idea of being suddenly evaluated, and considered the TPA process to be unnecessary and unproductive. Describing the resistance, he recounted the general feeling at that time: "if you had a good quality teacher that had been doing good work, say, for 18 years, now, why all of a sudden you are telling me that I have to do it differently." In contrast, some teachers responded positively to the TPA process, as they might have considered TPA as being a part of the "bigger picture" that involved developing school improvement plans and aligning them with board improvement plans. Ben noted that in the first phase of implementation, conducting the TPAs in a specified time period was not required, and staff did not see the urgency and seriousness of the process, as many teachers and administrators were feeling "pushed back" by the government. They were doing this for the sake of "lip service." In the later years, the resistance to TPA diminished as teachers were getting used to accepting the TPA as a necessary process that would help them align their annual learning goals with the goals of school. The process has received more proactive attention from both administrators and teachers recently. According to Ben, the

TPA is now an accepted part of the job and is conducted with more seriousness than in the past.

John stated that TPA is one of the instruments to identify how teachers can grow in teaching children. He observed that in the beginning, the process was conceived to be a mandate from the government and school boards. He believed that there has been no significant change in the mechanics of the TPA process, but now, the system has become more acceptable and inclusive. The process, moreover, allows Principals to get an overview of the abilities of teachers in their school and helps them in making improvement plans for teachers.

Tim presented an interesting perspective on the TPA process with respect to its name. He shared the opinion of his Director, who said that TPA should not just be a “teacher performance appraisal” but, rather, it should be a “teacher performance affirmation” because teachers are appreciated for their service, and consequently, they should be affirmed that they are effective. Tim was working as a teacher in 2002 when TPA was introduced, and he was not pleased with the new policy. He voiced his opinions on the ratings given to teachers at the end of evaluation. He considered the lack of subject matter expertise of administrators as one of the shortcomings of the TPA process. He argued that teachers often get distracted and deviate from their normal behavior when someone visits their classrooms; thus, they may not display their true potential in the observation during the TPA. So, he suggested that the Principals or Vice-Principals need to take time to visit classrooms on a regular basis so that teachers get used to visitors being in the classrooms. He also suggested that teacher evaluations should not be a one-



day affair; rather, they should reflect an administrators' comprehensive impression of the effectiveness of a teacher on a daily basis.

All the four participants expressed that teachers resisted the TPA process in the initial years of implementation, but now, it has been accepted as being a part of the profession. In the initial years, there were discrepancies noted in the TPA practice, especially in following the required guidelines set by the Ministry. Now, however, the process is streamlined and is followed more consistently than in the past. The TPA process has thus evolved over time, but it still is not very effective in fulfilling its goals.

### **Feedback to Teachers and its Effectiveness**

All the participants shared their experiences about what they have done and what should be done to improve the evaluation process; however, the information collected is not comprehensive in understanding the entire feedback process thoroughly.

Alex argues that the feedback mechanism in the TPA is not effective. He stated, "The whole process probably would have taken several days if you calculate the number of hours you put into it. I just didn't feel like it was time well spent. There was no legal follow up. Once the performance appraisal was done, it was done."

Alex felt that this TPA process was just taking another thing off the "to-do checklist" of the Principals – thus, being more of an administrative procedure than a developmental one. However, his opinion is based on his personal experience until he retired, which must be considered. Nevertheless, he thinks this program has the potential to be effective if Principals and teachers engage in a constructive dialogue and exchange feedback on the teaching and learning happening in the classroom.

Ben argues that the feedback process in TPA is also not very effective, as the formal process does not provide any opportunity for the coaching and mentoring of teachers. After a teacher is given a satisfactory rating, for instance, the Principal usually acknowledges the teacher and indicates what was rated in her or his evaluation. Ben, however, believed that this acknowledgement and applauding should not occur once every five years, but it should occur on a regular basis in the school year. Rather than a formal appraisal process, the Principal needs to find a way to create a collegial environment in the school that fosters professional learning and development. Ben observed that he never had a teacher that was unsatisfactory; he had teachers that needed to be disciplined, but he helped those teachers to better themselves. He shared an experience from a Principal from his professional network who dismissed a teacher from service after that teacher failed to earn a satisfactory rating on the TPA. Ben believes that the TPA can be an effective tool to discontinue incompetent teachers from service, but at the same time, it can also help identify teachers that need help and can provide them with an opportunity to improve. Ben also stated that the feedback mechanism from a teacher evaluation would be more effective if such feedback is provided in the form of everyday support rather than a formal process once every five years.

John recollected that none of the teachers he evaluated received an unsatisfactory rating. He did have teachers that needed growth, and he provided follow-up and advice to those teachers to improve their skills. John describes the negative consequences when a teacher receives an unsatisfactory rating, by stating that “the legality of the unsatisfactory teacher was something that could get extremely messy. You know, teachers are very well protected in their union.” He argued that teacher unions protect teachers – and that may

not help in discontinuing incompetent teachers. He observed that other than these ratings of being *satisfactory* or *unsatisfactory*, there is not much done to provide feedback to teachers on their evaluation. He suggested that it would be useful to know more information about teachers and their goals and plans before evaluating them.

Tim also observed that a Principal should not leave the evaluation process after giving a satisfactory rating. Feedback with what the teacher has done well and what their areas for improvement will help teachers to improve their teaching abilities. Principals could, for instance, highlight the things the teacher can keep doing and the things the teacher can change to improve in their profession. Tim also stressed the need to communicate with teachers and identify what they need to improve even before the TPA commences. Tim suggested that teachers that received an unsatisfactory rating should be given feedback and helped in the same way a struggling student is supported.

To conclude, all four participants noted that the feedback mechanism that follows an appraisal is not very effective in facilitating teacher learning and development. It is observed that a teacher receiving an unsatisfactory rating receives follow-up after the evaluation is done so that the teacher can, presumably, work on the areas of improvement. On the other hand, a teacher receiving a satisfactory rating is given a report of her or his performance, but does not receive any further follow-up to identify their strengths and weaknesses until the next evaluation cycle. In this way, the feedback mechanism for a teacher with a satisfactory rating is not effective in professional learning and development. All four participants believed that the TPA process has the potential to be more effective in teacher learning and development.

### **Professional Relationships Between Teachers and Principals**

One sub-question of the study was intended to identify the impact of the TPA process on the teacher and Principal professional relationship. Participants of this study shared their opinions and perspectives on the relationship they observed between a teacher and an administrator after the TPA was administered.

Alex recollected that he became a Principal when the Principals were part of the teachers' union. He recalls that the environment then was very collaborative. The relationship became less collaborative, however, after the Principals were removed from the teachers' unions, and it became further deteriorated after the TPA was introduced. He added, "It became more of a boss-employee relationship rather than a collaborative team." He stated that things changed after a few years and now, the relationship between teachers and Principals are less acerbic. He also adds that teachers accept the TPA process, and there has been much less challenge of the Principal's authority or disagreement with a Principal's evaluation in recent years. He feels that the environment is becoming much more collegial now that the Ministry has softened the appraisal process, and he described it as an, "encouraging collegial environment."

Ben also identified that the relationship between teachers and administrators were problematic in the initial years of the TPA implementation. He mentioned that there was resistance from teachers about the process, and they did not hold it in high esteem; therefore, there was a negative impact on the relationship between teachers and administrators. In the recent years, teachers and Principals accepted the TPA as a part of their job, and teachers are now less resistant to and skeptical of the process. This has led to mutually-respectful environments in schools where both teachers and Principals work

together in aligning their goals with those of the school, the school board, and the Ministry.

The broad opinion from participants in this study indicates that the teacher and administrator relationships suffered and became negative in the initial years of implementation of the TPA. The situation, however, has improved, and in recent years, teachers and administrators share positive and cooperative relationships. Three participants argued that the relationship between administrators and teachers has become less hostile. One observed that the TPA process has overcome the administrators' verses teachers' opinion. Administrators are now providing a positive environment by creating constructive dialogue to relay professional experiences and knowledge. All the four participants stressed the need for effective communication between teachers and administrators in helping teacher professional development.

In summary, all four participants observed that the teacher and administrator professional relationship has improved over time. In the initial years of the TPA implementation, teachers resisted the TPA process, and they felt that administrators became more managerial in their approach. Three participants observed that the relationship between teachers and administrators became less hostile over time. The relationship became more collegial and collaborative in recent years.

### **Challenges in the Process**

Identifying the challenges in the TPA process was an important part of this study. The general impression of all the participants is that the TPA is time-consuming, and thus, time management poses the biggest challenge to the effective implementation of

this process. Each participant shared their opinions on specific issues they encountered in their conducting TPA.

Alex, for instance, noted that he found it interesting and challenging when teachers discussed the rating they received in their evaluation with each other in the initial years of the TPA, even though doing so was not expected from teachers, as the evaluation ratings should be kept confidential. This caused jealousy among teachers, and further damaged some already fragile relationships among the staff. It was a time when the Principals and administrators were removed from the teachers' union, and there was a feeling among teachers that the relationship with their administrators changed from being a colleague to that of a boss and an employee. TPA further widened this divide between teachers and administrators. Alex points out that in recently, such negative feelings have diminished among teachers and administrators, and there is now a collaborative and collegial environment in schools.

Ben considers that the teachers' skeptical attitude towards the TPA process in the initial years was the biggest challenge. For instance, he noted that it was difficult to convince teachers that the administrators were not against them. This hostile environment gradually diminished, however, and in recent years, the relationships have improved. Ben also mentions the constraints of time as being another significant challenge. Principals and Vice-Principals deal with various types of unexpected situations in school on a daily basis, and they may not be able to devote their undivided attention and time to the formal process of the TPA. Sometimes, for instance, the administrators may have to reschedule a classroom observation due to an emergency situation in the school. Ben also argued that it is challenging to align teachers' goals with school goals, as teachers may not like to be

told that they are not doing a satisfactory job, and that all teachers may not receive the feedback in a constructive way.

Likewise, John stated that the TPA process is absolutely a time consuming process, but is a necessary part of the job. He observed that administrators have scarce time, but with careful time management skills, they can overcome the additional challenge that the TPA process presents. John also expressed the idea that there was a divide between teachers and administrators in the beginning of the TPA process, but it has softened over time. Describing a challenge regarding some teachers' attitudes towards change and unfavorable situations, he stated that, "some staff are very averse to change. They do not wish to have anything different, and when something is different, they become ... they put their backs up and some of them become very passive aggressive people." He believed that some teachers are averse to change, and may feel threatened by a new process such as the TPA. He thinks that it is challenging to create an environment that promotes collegial support in these times of change. John also argues that some teachers may not prefer to learn from others, and guiding them could thus be challenging.

Tim, like the other participants, considers time management as a challenge for administrators. He states that there are demands on administrators that are not always visible to teachers and the public at large. He mentions an interesting point that sometimes, students tell the administrators about their teachers long before administrators go for a classroom observation. This feedback from students may interfere with the administrator's opinions when conducting the teacher's evaluation. Another challenge, according to Tim, is that the Principal or Vice-Principal who evaluates a teacher may not

have expertise in the subject area that the educator is teaching in. This shortcoming is more evident in high schools, where an administrator may not be aware of the content and context of the lesson during their classroom visit. Tim observed that another challenge in the TPA process is the resistance of experienced teachers to the evaluation process and the feedback given to teachers. He also mentions that, similar to the other three participants' observations, in the early years of the TPA implementation, it was challenging convincing teachers that administrators were not against them. All four participants argued that the TPA is very time-consuming, and they found it difficult to allocate sufficient time to conduct the TPAs. In contrast, all of them suggested that teachers should be evaluated more often than once every five years. All the participants felt that the TPA process would be more effective if there were more appraisals for teachers in spite of the time constraints that exist.

### **Recommendations from Participants**

All the four participants shared their recommendations on improving the TPA process to make it more effective. The key ideas from the data reveal that communication between teachers and administrators plays a vital role, and it should be improved in order to improve the TPA process. The participants' opinions can be summarized into the following statement: the TPA process should not be conducted as an event every five years – rather, it should be conducted as a continuous process over a five years period.

Alex argues that it is important for an administrator to guide teachers in aligning their goals with their school's goals. This is possible when administrators and teachers engage in constructive dialogue to develop goals that are in line with both school and system priorities. Alex strongly believes that a daily visit to classrooms is a more



effective approach. He stated, “I think a daily visit, even if it’s a few minutes, is more effective than a scheduled one time visit.” He observed that it is unlikely that policy permits administrators to include the impression of everyday observations of teachers’ behavior in school as part of their evaluation; however, he believes that such a practice would increase the engagement of teachers in the process and that it would be a better tool to ensure accountability in schools.

Ben advocated for a practice in schools where the administrators help teachers understand the system goals and school goals in order to assist teachers in setting their own aligned goals. He thinks that developing such a practice is challenging, but effective. He recommends that administrators and teachers engage in effective communication on a daily basis. He also suggests that the TPA process need not necessarily happen once every five years; it would be better if the TPA was conducted more often, in other words. He encourages administrators to look for avenues to provide coaching and mentoring to teachers to improve their skills. He adds that,

I think the coaching and mentoring is often omitted from this process, so you don’t hear coaching and mentoring too much. It is a very cut and dry, formal, technical process, and some of the best learning comes from me and a couple of teachers sitting down after the work day and talk about what’s working? What’s not? What can we do to help each other? What do we need to do differently? What do we need to bring back? ... Sort of collaborative effort. And that to me is the best process.

Ben also suggested that there is a need to have a means of discontinuing incompetent teachers from service. He stated that,

You know what, if we, god forbid, had some terrible sickness, we want to go to the best equipped, most current and well researched doctor to get well. And the kids and parents should deserve no less of the teachers.

John believed that the TPA should go beyond just completing paperwork once every five years. He recommends that there should be a follow-up process every year so that teachers get an opportunity to identify where they stand, and administrators can get a better picture of the skills and abilities of their staff. A follow-up every year would make teachers more accountable, and would allow administrators to discuss the annual learning plans of teachers and, moreover, to ensure those plans were aligned with school and system goals. He also suggests that a constructive dialogue between a teacher and a Principal could help teachers feel accomplished and appreciated. He emphasizes this opinion by stating “you know what, if you are able to sit with a professional and say, ‘I like what you’re doing,’ and sometimes adults need to be stroked and be told, ‘you are doing good job,’ too.”

Tim states that communication is key: if administrators communicate well with teachers to understand the need and purpose of an appraisal, then teachers would feel more comfortable undergoing the TPA process. He also states that teachers should take proactive initiation to seek regular feedback and suggestions to improve themselves. He states that, “we check our cars at regular intervals to ensure they are working properly, same should be the case with teachers.” He also recommends, especially for large high schools, that the Principals and Vice-Principals ensure that they know the content and subject matter of the teachers’ lesson when conducting a classroom observation. In doing so, the administrators can choose to evaluate teachers whose subject areas are familiar to

the administrators themselves. He also recommends that Principals make a practice of visiting classrooms on a regular basis. He states that,

I know teachers get really hung upon someone coming into classroom, and that's why it is important for administrators to get out of office and go walk around school, pop into a classroom once in a while. Go in, just to see what they are doing. You are not checking upon the teacher; you are just taking an active role in your school being an active participant.

He argues that if Principals take an active role in their school, then they will have an opportunity to develop a holistic impression of what is happening in school, and they will consequently be able to make informed appraisals of teachers when the time is due.

When asked about whether the TPA process should be continued, all the participants expressed that it should be continued. They see merit in the program and they state that the program has the potential to become more effective if some of the changes, discussed in the sections above, are made to the program. All the participants expressed that there should be measures such as the TPA to ensure accountability in schools, as the public expects accountability for the spending of tax dollars.

Alex and Ben both believe that the TPA process is functioning as a measure of accountability. Ben stressed the importance and need for accountability in education by stating that:

Firstly, all industry, businesses, organizations, government, and services should and do have policies, governance and standards for their respective professions. This, I believe is a good idea. The teaching profession should be no different, especially when dealing with our greatest commodities-children.

He advocates for teacher evaluations to make educators accountable. On the other hand, he observes that assessing teaching ability can be subjective due to differing pedagogical approaches, personalities, school climates, and other variables. He continued by stating, “I still believe that most educators welcome feedback on their performance and that Principals find it an effective tool for ensuring accountability.” Tim, on the other hand, states that, “The TPA is somewhat a measure of accountability. It does serve as a measuring tool for certain aspects of teaching. It does not however assess the human side of a teacher. The TPA by nature is somewhat mechanical.” He continues to note that teachers prepare their best lessons for the appraisal, and thus, the appraised lesson may not be a true reflection of a teacher’s usual teaching abilities.

The data did not yield significant information about the training received by administrators in conducting the TPA. All the participants shared their experiences, and could not share information about what happened in other schools and districts; so, sufficient information on the fairness and consistency in the implementation of TPA could not be gathered.

To summarize, all four participants observed that the TPA process has the potential to be a more effective process if it is possible to include the holistic impression of administrators on teachers as part of their evaluation. The participants also stressed the importance of communication: they suggested that administrators and teachers should engage in collaborative, constructive dialogue to encourage teachers to align their annual learning goals to the school improvement plans. All four participants recommended conducting more frequent evaluations to improve the process, as well. Three participants

encouraged the administrators to visit classrooms on a regular basis, even if only for a few minutes each day.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study examined the perspectives of retired administrators on the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario schools. Four participants, three retired Principals and one retired Vice-Principal, shared their experiences and perspectives on the TPA process. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which were digitally recorded. The conversations were transcribed manually and sent to participants to ensure the accuracy of the information they shared.

This chapter provided an overview of the findings of the study. The chapter began with brief background information of the participants. Key information gathered in the data collection was presented in five sections that represent the five sub-questions of the study. A synthesis of responses pertaining to each sub-question was presented in the corresponding section in this chapter.

Findings indicate that the TPA process has evolved over time, and is now accepted as an integral part of teachers' and administrators' duties. All the participants observed that the process is not very effective in fulfilling its goal of teacher learning and development. However, all the participants believe that the TPA has the potential to be more effective. One important challenge to this process is the amount of time required to conduct the TPA. Even though the TPA is time-consuming, surprisingly, all the participants suggested that the TPA should be conducted more frequently. Participants

also suggested that the TPA should consider including an administrator's everyday impressions of a teacher in their appraisal process.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study aims to examine the perspectives of retired Principals and Vice-Principals on the effectiveness of the TPA process that was introduced in Ontario in 2002 as a measure of accountability in education. This study could provide a better understanding of the TPA process and its recent practice to identify its usefulness and effectiveness. The TPA process is expected to help teachers' professional development; this study could thus help gain a more in-depth understanding of if this goal is being fulfilled. This chapter provides a summary of the study, followed by a discussion of key findings in relation to the existing information from previous research studies; this information is presented in three sections. At the end of the chapter, a conclusion of the study is presented, along with suggestions for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the TPA process in Ontario; so, a basic qualitative study design was chosen for this study. This study does not aim to establish a theory or develop a case study; rather, it attempts to examine the perspectives of retired Principals to gain a deeper understanding of a process, and thus a basic qualitative study methodology is appropriate. Three retired Principals and one retired Vice-Principal were interviewed for this study. All the participants had experience conducting the TPA process during their service in education. The interviews were conducted one-on-one and in-person; each interview lasted between 40 to 50 minutes. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were prepared for this study. Semi-structured interview and open-ended question provided the participants with an opportunity to express their views in an unconstrained way.

Interview conversations were digitally recorded, and transcripts were prepared and sent to the participants to verify the accuracy of information they provided through a member check. Three participants provided feedback on the transcripts and added some additional information. Data were then analyzed by coding and identifying broad themes according to the respective research sub-questions.

The findings of the study were analyzed and presented in relation to the five sub-questions of the study. All of the participants concur that the TPA was introduced as a measure of accountability in education in Ontario; however, they believe that the process is not very effective in facilitating teachers' professional development. The TPA has evolved from the time of its inception until now; teachers were very negative about the process in the beginning, though now, they seem to accept it as a norm of the profession. The participants also believe that the TPA process has the potential to be an effective tool to develop teachers and act as a measure of accountability, but it has to undergo changes in order to become more effective. Another finding related to the feedback system in the TPA process is that there is some follow-up with teachers who receive an unsatisfactory rating, but there is no follow-up with teachers who may have received a satisfactory rating. The TPA process showed a negative impact on the teacher and Principal professional relationship during the initial years of the implementation; however, more recently, the process appears to have been accepted a part of the job and it does not create negativity. All of the participants expressed that the TPA process is time-consuming, but thought that Principals and Vice-Principals should organize their time in such a way that they give due attention to the evaluation of teachers. They also recommend that the frequency of the evaluations should be increased to conduct evaluations more often rather



than merely once every five years. Additionally, they suggested creating process in which a teacher is evaluated on a daily basis rather than only during a single scheduled classroom visit; the participants thought it would be more effective if a Principal visits a teacher's class on a daily basis, even for merely a few minutes, to observe. The overall impression from these daily visits could then be included in the teacher's evaluation.

## **Discussion**

### **Evolution of the TPA Over Time**

Middlewood (2001) presents a model of performance appraisal in public services that describes the relation between the political control and central direction exercised by governments (p. 182-183). He termed the approach in which there is a high political control of the government and also high levels of central direction as being a *top-down control model*. Conversely, a *soft model* involves lower political control and central direction from the government. The intermediate approach in which there is a balanced involvement from the government is called the *middle of the road approach*.

Governments tend to follow these approaches depending on the current political and social conditions existing in the society. These models apply to all public services, including education. When a government is following a *top-down approach*, they tend to exercise the power vested within them in appraising services. Conversely, if a government exercises a *soft model*, they give more flexibility and responsibility to the implementers of policies or services from the government.

Information from previous research studies on the TPA process and the findings of this research study indicate that teachers were appraised in a *top-down model* in the early years of the TPA implementation. This observation resonates with the punitive

approach the Conservative government followed from 1995-2003. The situation has since changed over time, and recently, teachers feel that the TPA policy is no longer an enforced practice; rather, they consider it to be an integral part of their duties. In the early years of its implementation, teachers considered the TPA process to be a measure of accountability forced upon them. After the Liberal government assumed power in 2003, however, they followed a non-punitive approach towards education; instead of exercising their power, then, the government shared the power with teachers and administrators, thereby leading to a positive environment (Fullan, 2015).

The TPA process's evolution from a negatively perceived process to a positive integral part of teachers' public service could also be attributed to the differences in the directions taken by the government in determining the emphasis given to performance appraisals. Middlewood and Cardno (2001) present a continuum of emphasis in systems of performance appraisal (p. 5). According to Middlewood and Cardno (2001), governments decide the direction of emphasis in the performance appraisal process. The continuum is either directed towards *emphasis on assessing performance outcomes* or to the opposite, which is *emphasis on teachers' professional development*. It can be inferred that, in terms of this continuum, Ontario has always been moving in the direction of *emphasis on teachers' professional development*, because Ontario does not evaluate teachers based on student performance outcomes. Even in the early years of implementation when the TPA process was received with resistance, the purpose of the TPA was always to improve teachers.

However, it appears from the findings of this study that there is much more to be done to make the TPA process truly effective in teacher professional development and

improvement. All of the respondents believe that the process, in its current form, is not particularly effective in facilitating the professional development of teachers. The intentions of the program are to provide a platform for teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses, in order for them to improve. Studies conducted by Larsen (2009) and Maharaj (2014) revealed that the TPA process could be effective in identifying incompetent teachers, but that it is not very effective in further improving teachers who perform at acceptable levels. Participants in this study also resonate with the findings of Larsen (2009) and Maharaj (2014), showing a consistency in perception among educational professionals.

The general opinion of the participants of this study on the evolution of the TPA process is that the stress associated with the process had gradually faded out over time. In the early years of the TPA implementation, teachers were of the opinion that administrators were becoming more managerial in their approach, and there was a divide between teachers and administrators, especially after the Principals were removed from the teacher unions. In the recent years, however, that feeling of alienation is not seen; teachers and administrators now share a mutually-respected space within schools. The modifications to the TPA process in 2007 removed several negative elements from the process itself. The two evaluation ratings, as opposed to four ratings in the past, proved to be effective in mitigating teacher resistance to the process. This helped rebuild the collegial relationships between teachers and administrators. Overall, the TPA process has evolved from the time it was introduced: it has become less stressful, less cumbersome, more collegial, and more accepted as part of the profession, despite its downfalls in not fully facilitating teacher development and improvement.

The TPA process was introduced in Ontario as a measure of accountability by the government; doing so reflects the Conservative government's neo-liberal approach towards education (Sattler, 2012). However, after 2003, the Liberal government had a different approach to education governance in Ontario. Liberals also followed neo-liberal approaches to education, but with a non-punitive approach towards teachers (Fullan, 2015). They helped create a collaborative working culture in schools in Ontario. Thus, the intent of TPA differs from its inception in 2002 to that of the present time. In 2002, it was a desperate measure to enforce accountability in education.

The findings of this study indicate that administrators and teachers no longer consider TPA to be a process forced upon them; rather, they willingly participate in the process. Retired administrators in this study consider the TPA to be a measure of accountability, but they believe the process has been softened over time. Literature on the TPA and the findings of this study indicate that, in the first few years of the TPA implementation, teachers felt it was a stressful and ineffective process, as they felt forced by the punitive approach of the Conservative government. After 2003, the Liberal government followed a non-punitive approach towards educators, and focused their efforts instead on capacity building. This observation can be related to the *internal accountability* concept stated by Fullan (2015). According to Fullan, since 2003, Ontario focused its education efforts on capacity building and *cultural* changes rather than solely focusing on *structural* changes. It can be inferred that the TPA was introduced in 2002 as a structural change by the Conservative government, but later, the Liberal government worked to bring out a change in culture. This inference can provide context for the

observation of the participants of this study who did not consider the TPA to be a strong measure of accountability.

### **Effectiveness of Feedback to Teachers**

Middlewood and Cardno (2001) state that, “ideally, feedback builds a platform for launching possibilities for development. This implies that the most important appraisal activity is interpersonal and not technical” (p. 11). They also elaborate that when technical purposes are given priority over improvement purposes, the appraisal process may become a mundane task comprised of just ticking items off a check-list to ensure that minimum criteria have been met. Leithwood (2001) argues that if the feedback given to evaluated individuals does not focus on making them effective in their roles, such a feedback will not contribute to the development of the organization. Darling-Hammond (2013) argues that the follow-up conversations conducted after a teacher evaluation often ignore and disregard ways to improve the quality of teaching. Similarly, evaluations are not often used to address teachers’ unique learning needs.

Previous studies on the TPA process indicate that the feedback given after an evaluation is not particularly effective. A teacher who earns an unsatisfactory rating is given follow-up and support to improve; however, teachers who receive a satisfactory rating are not given any follow-up or improvement measures to make themselves better professionals. Once a teacher is rated as being *satisfactory*, they have no evaluation or formal feedback opportunity until the next five year evaluation cycle. The findings in this study are similar: participants expressed that there is no follow-up with a teacher who receives a satisfactory rating in an evaluation. They also expressed that this feedback system is not effective in contributing to the professional development of teachers. A

common opinion expressed in the study is that teacher development can instead be attributed to the professional development activities conducted on a regular basis in school; the TPA process and its feedback, however, are not effective in contributing to this development. The overall findings of the study indicate that feedback given to satisfactory teachers is ineffective because a teacher is evaluated only once every five years, and the evaluation criteria do not allow administrators to include their impression of a teacher and his or her performance on a daily basis. Feedback would be more effective if it was given on a regular basis, however. Similarly, feedback given to a teacher who received an unsatisfactory rating is somewhat useful.

As Leithwood (2001), Middlewood and Cardno (2001), and Darling-Hammond (2013) observed, if the feedback given to teachers is not contributing to the improvement of their effectiveness and professional development, then the evaluation becomes a mundane process, and a means to merely take off items of a check list. It appears that the feedback mechanism in the TPA process is not effective in promoting teacher performance improvement or development, which ironically is one of the primary purposes of the TPA. It is worthwhile to reconsider the feedback mechanism in the TPA process to make it more effective.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations from Retired Professionals**

Darling-Hammond (2013) observes that existing tools for teacher evaluation may not represent important features of good teaching, and many Principals may not have access to the professional development and support they need to become expert instructional leaders and evaluators of teaching. It is nearly impossible for Principals to have the time or content expertise to evaluate all of the teachers they supervise (Darling-

Hammond, 2013). The greatest challenge for administrators is to meet the organizational goals and also to maintain positive collegial relationships; thus, managing appraisals is a challenge (Middlewood & Cardno, 2001). Natriello (1990) asserts that in order to understand the major purposes of teacher evaluation system, it is important to recognize that teacher evaluation occurs within an organizational context. This observation implies that the evaluation of teachers or other professionals happens on a daily basis in an organization such as a school. Students, administrators, and parents alike observe teachers on a regular basis and then form opinions of them. The evaluation of teachers based solely on one session of classroom observation may not, then, be effective if the evaluation process does not include the observations of the same teacher on a daily basis.

The findings in this study indicate that finding the availability of time to conduct teacher evaluations in an unconstrained, consistent way is challenging. There is a unanimous impression from the study that the TPA is a tedious process that requires a great deal of time; however, the participants believe that it should be continued, as it has the potential to be an effective process to help teachers improve their performance. In its current form, TPA is not very effective in contributing to teachers' performance improvement or development, but if the process were to be modified to include the daily impressions of administrators on teachers as a part of the evaluation, then it could be. There is an interest expressed by participants in this study to adopt such process, in which a teacher is evaluated holistically over a period of time rather than in a single classroom observation; even though it adds more work and consumes more time from the administrators, it would provide a more authentic assessment of that teacher's performance. Another recommendation from the study is that there should be a required

follow-up process every year with all teachers to discuss their and how they can be aligned with their School Improvement Plans. This task of follow-up every year is undoubtedly an additional burden on administrators and teachers, however, who already have scarce time available.

As Middlewood and Cardno (2001) observe that it is challenging for administrators to maintain positive, collegial relationships with their staff in addition to meeting their organizational goals. Relationship management between administrators and teachers, and administrators' ability to maintain a collegial environment, have been identified as some significant challenges from the data collected for this study. Participants recommend that it is worthwhile for Principals to look for opportunities to help teachers in providing coaching and mentoring on a regular basis. It is already evident that evaluations are functioning as a means to improve teacher performance and development; a constructive collegial dialogue between a Principal and a teacher would also help in identifying the areas that teachers need support with, and Principals can take the initiative to look for solutions to facilitate growth in such areas of improvement.

A study conducted by Maharaj (2014) revealed that administrators advocate for conducting the TPA more frequently than merely once every five years. A similar opinion is expressed in the data collected for this study. All the participants suggested that one evaluation every five years is infrequent, and it would be useful to have more frequent appraisals. Contrary to this, an earlier study conducted by Larsen (2009) indicates that teachers were not favorable to the idea of more frequent evaluations. This discrepancy resonates with the argument of Hickcox et al. (1988) who found that administrators perceive there to be value in teacher evaluations, as they believed the



evaluations contributed to the improvement of teacher performance; on the other hand, teachers do not perceive their evaluations as contributing positively to their performance improvement. This study concurs to the point that administrators still ascribe value to teacher evaluations; but, the process would be more effective if TPA were modified.

Retired Principals in this study recommend that school administrators should focus on creating a successful form of communication among teachers, other staff, and administrators. It is mentioned that often, administrators are confined to their office, owing to their cumbersome administrative responsibilities; however, it is worthwhile for them to allocate some time every day to develop a habit of visiting classrooms, even for a few minutes, to engage with teachers and students. This regular visiting of Principals to classrooms could help teachers in 'getting used to' to visitors being a part of their daily teacher, and thus, they would find it to be 'normal; when a Principal visits their classroom for a performance appraisal. Previous studies indicated that teachers and students can deviate from their normal behavior when there is a stranger or visitor in the classroom. Thus, the practice of conducting regular visits to classrooms could potentially address this issue and help teachers and students behave normally when a Principal visits a class for teacher appraisal.

Darling-Hammond (2013) noted that it is highly improbable for administrators to have both the time and content expertise required to effectively evaluate teachers. A similar point of view is revealed in this study regarding how Principals lack subject matter expertise in evaluating a teacher; however, especially in larger high schools, it is possible for Principals and Vice-Principals to identify potential teacher evaluations based on their awareness, if not expertise, in the subject matter. For instance, a Vice-Principal

who has experience teaching a language can evaluate teachers that teach language. This kind of selection of teacher evaluators according to the administrator's familiarity in subject matter will make the evaluation more effective.

The striking recommendation from this study is that the TPA process should not be conducted as a 'one shot' event every five years; rather, it should be conducted as a continuous process on a daily basis. In its current form, a teacher evaluation is conducted as if it were an event that occurs once every five years, and such an appraisal is not likely to consider the organizational impact of a teacher's performance. This one-time evaluation provides only an impression of a teacher's performance on that specific given day. It would be more effective if the teacher evaluation occurred as a continuous process of teacher development that includes an administrator's holistic impression of a teacher's performance on a daily basis. Therefore, it is recommended that a teacher's evaluation should involve a regular process of dialogue between a Principal and teacher, followed by regular feedback to improve all teachers' performance that, in turn, contributes to the achievement of the School Improvement Plan. The possibility of bringing up such a change in the structure and function of TPA may be highly unlikely, given the potential unwillingness of teachers, and the strength of the teacher unions that may oppose; but, it could definitely be worth considering at least for a discussion.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the perspectives of retired Principals on the effectiveness of the TPA as a tool to improve teacher performance, and also as a measure of accountability. All the four participants in the study had experience conducting the TPA process during their service. Two of them have experience conducting the TPA in the initial years of its

implementation, and also after it was modified in 2007. Three of the participants retired within the last 3 years. They shared their rich experiences and perspectives to gain a better understanding of the TPA process from an administrator's perspective. They also made suggestions and recommendations to improve the TPA system. The following are the key finding of the study:

1. The TPA process has evolved from being a very negatively perceived process at the time of its introduction into a positive process that is now accepted as part of the profession.
2. Teacher and Principal professional relationships have improved over time. In the beginning of the TPA implementation, teachers felt themselves alienated from administrators, and there was friction among them; however, now they have positive collegial relationships.
3. The feedback given to teachers after an evaluation is conducted is not very effective, especially to a teacher that earned a satisfactory rating. There is no mandatory follow-up until the next five year evaluation cycle once an evaluation is performed. So, the general opinion from the study is that the feedback does not contribute much to teachers' professional development.
4. Study findings indicate that the TPA process consumes a great deal of time for administrators; however, the participants advocate that the TPA should be conducted more frequently, and it should be supported by a system of providing regular feedback to teachers so that it becomes more effective in improving teacher performance.

5. The study suggests that it would be worthwhile for Principals to develop a habit of visiting classrooms for a few minutes on a daily basis to observe teachers; doing so will help them in gaining a better observation of teachers and students, and Principals can then monitor the learning process that is occurring in a classroom to provide a more authentic evaluation.
6. This study indicates that TPA can be more effective if it is conducted as a continuous process on a daily basis rather than one appraisal conducted once every five years. It requires more attention from educators and policy-makers to evaluate opportunities to make it a holistic process of regular observation and feedback, rather than a single classroom observation.
7. This study's findings about the TPA process as being a measure of accountability indicate that the TPA is considered to be a tool to ensure accountability in education, but the tone and context of its application have evolved over time from an enforced process to a more collaborative, collective effort.

This study presented the views and experiences of retired professionals that have seen their share of the positives and negatives in the TPA process. They have seen the process evolve over time. So, the findings of the study can be useful, as the administrators who participated may have perceived the TPA process from a different dimension. Suggestions and recommendations presented in the study will help working administrators to identify potential solutions to some of the challenges they face.

Educators and educational leaders can use this study to evaluate the TPA process and its

effectiveness in the current situation. Policy-makers may consider the findings of this study and its suggestions in future policy-making processes.

This study identified the following areas for further research:

1. This study is conducted with a small number of participants due to constraints of time. A study with a larger sample would gain a better and even deeper understanding of the TPA process and its effectiveness.
2. This study is from the administrators' perspectives. It is worthwhile to consider conducting a research study on teachers' perspectives in order to explore teachers' views on TPA as a tool for teacher professional learning and development.

I would like to conclude this research paper by presenting my personal opinion on the TPA process. The social and political conditions of the time when the TPA was introduced now have changed significantly. At the time of the TPA introduction, it was considered to be a tool for accountability in education. It was received with resistance and negativity. After 2003, however, the Liberal government's focus on education changed, and the government's approach now appears to be constructive. The TPA process is still conducted as a measure of accountability in education, but now with an increased focus on capacity building; however, it still does not appear to be effective. The non-punitive approach from the government has definitely created a positive environment in schools. I think it is not far-fetched to hope that educators and policy-makers would consider evaluating the effectiveness of the TPA at higher levels to make it more relevant to the current conditions of school systems in Ontario. If the appraisal process helps

teachers improve, then they become more effective in facilitating learning in students – and, at the end of the day, that is the ultimate goal of education.

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## Appendix Interview Guide

### Main Questions

1. Tell me about your perspectives of conducting the TPA process.
2. What kind of training did you receive in order to conduct teacher evaluations?
3. How did you follow the procedures set for the TPA process?
4. What is your opinion on the effect of the TPA process on teacher professional development?
5. What problems/challenges do you see in this program?
6. How did the TPA process impact the teacher-Principal relations?
7. What recommendations do you give to working Principals in conducting an effective TPA process?
8. What feedback/suggestions would you give to the policy-makers to improve/enhance the TPA process?
9. Do you consider TPA is perceived as a measure of accountability?

### Follow-Up Questions

1. What is your opinion on the level and the quality of the training?
2. How fairly are TPAs conducted? (In terms of time and attention allocated to each teacher for the process of evaluation)
3. What kind of feedback did you give to teachers after the evaluation process? How effective was this feedback?
4. What benefits do you see in the current TPA program in Ontario?
5. What were teachers' reactions/responses to the TPA process?